

Canadian Government. Some, I think, would like to have seen an effective international commission. For others, it was sufficient for their purposes that a commission of some sort should exist. Their reasons were more in the realm of psychology and local considerations than arising out of a conviction that the ICCS as constituted could, in fact, ensure the carrying-out of the terms of the agreement.

For reasons that are easy to understand, governments of countries that are not directly involved in Vietnam present more general but familiar arguments to the effect that any international presence is better than no international presence, and that, even though there is no guarantee the Commission will ever do anything useful, Canada should nevertheless continue to serve against the possibility that it might be able to do something at some future time. This is not our own assessment of the Commission's *raison d'être*, or necessarily the assessment of those who advance the argument, but it illustrates a danger present in taking on assignments such as this. The job tends to create its own justification. For our part, after 19 years experience in Vietnam, we are not greatly impressed by this sort of argument.

The attitude of the leaders in South Vietnam was considerably more direct. They had no illusions that the ICCS would be able to perform in the manner envisaged in the agreement and protocols. Nor did they dispute our suggestion that the Commission was not a vital or integral part of the agreement itself since, if the parties wished to apply the agreement, they could do so without reference to the ICCS and, if they did not wish to honour the agreement, the ICCS could not oblige them to do so. I explained very frankly to the Vietnamese, both in the South and in the North, that the composition of the Commission rendered it virtually impossible for it ever to make a report that would be unfavourable to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or the Provisional Revolutionary Government side, while, because of our desire to be objective, it is quite conceivable that we should find ourselves supporting a report detrimental to the RVN position.

The South Vietnamese leaders recognized this but claimed that, as long as we were present to bring all points of view into the public domain, we were helping their cause. They also laid great stress on what they called the political settlement. They said that they were concentrating their best efforts on the conversations now taking place in Paris with the PRG to set up the joint National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, which is provided for under the peace agreement, which is, in turn, to make preparations for the holding of an election which would determine the political future of South Vietnam. I was told by President Thieu that it was in this area that he would seek his ultimate solution. If this failed, it would not be for want of trying on his part.

In my conversations with Foreign Minister Lam and President Thieu, I raised the question of civilian prisoners in South Vietnam. I urged them to consider the weight of public opinion in Canada and abroad on this matter. Both told me that they had already released 5,000 civilian prisoners on the occasion of the recent Lunar New Year celebrations and that they had provided a list of over 5,000 additional civilian prisoners to the other South Vietnamese party for release in accordance with the Paris agreement and